



Representative
Ruth Kagi

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- Appropriations
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2004 *Session Report*



Dear Neighbors,

The New Year means a fresh beginning for the Legislature, as we reconvene in Olympia to carry on the state's business in the 2004 Legislative Session.

This is a short session – only 60 days – but there's a lot of work to be done, and a lot of bills that can greatly affect our quality of life for years to come.

Education bills are a top priority. We must pass legislation to clearly establish high school graduation requirements, and provide multiple opportunities for students to succeed. The House has already passed a constitutional amendment to allow a "simple majority" to pass school levies. If approved by the Senate, this will go to the voters for approval. We also must address the serious funding crisis in our K-12 and higher education institutions – but we have few resources to do so.

Jobs and the economy remain critical issues for our consideration. Last session, we worked hard to assure that Boeing will continue to build its planes in Washington. I am very pleased that Boeing decided to build the 7E7 in Everett. Tax exemptions for other businesses – including high tech and biotech companies – are being proposed this session. Any such proposals must guarantee that new tax exemptions are directly tied to job creation – and companies are held accountable for those new jobs.

A spirit of cooperation and creativity within the Legislature and among our fellow citizens helped land the 7E7 project. I hope to see that same spirit this session, as we continue down the path towards economic recovery.

Please call or e-mail me with your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Rep. Ruth Kagi



Education – An Investment in our Future

Finding jobs is directly linked to a world-class education system for our children. Students in Washington should have excellent schools and teachers.

This year's high school freshmen will be the first class required to pass the state's standards test, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). I do not want to see any children drop out or fail to achieve our standards. However, I do not believe that a single test is always the best method to evaluate a

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student or a school. Allowing for commonsense changes in the WASL and alternative ways for students to prove they've mastered core subjects will provide needed opportunities for students to succeed.

The time has also come to allow our schools to pass levies with a simple majority. Currently, a school levy can fail even when it receives 59 percent of the vote from local citizens. That's not right. We shouldn't make it any harder for our schools to receive the support they need.

Another hot topic this session will be Charter Schools. These are publicly financed schools that are independent of most state laws and rules. The contract, or charter, details how the school will be organized and managed, what students will be taught and expected to achieve, and how success will be measured. Currently, schools funded by taxpayer dollars are governed by elected school boards, and are subject to state laws and rules.

This will be a very contentious issue. Some believe that charter schools will be more responsive to the needs of children, especially those who are educationally disadvantaged. Others believe that this just diverts more money away from our public schools at a time when they can least afford it.

Members of the PTA, school boards, teachers, and superintendents have expressed their strong opposition to charter schools as proposed. I will oppose the bill unless school boards have approval authority for charter schools.

Stopping the Outsourcing Epidemic

Here in Washington, our economy relies on global trade much more than most other states. Consequently, our businesses must compete not only with other Americans, but also with other countries. Some businesses keep costs low by outsourcing their work to countries where wages are lower and there are no protections or benefits for workers.

This "race to the bottom" isn't just isolated to blue-collar, manufacturing jobs. Almost every industry is now susceptible to job-loss overseas, from service centers to the high-skilled computer programming and biotech positions that were the driving force behind our region's economic boom of the 90s.

I am supporting a package of bills that will prohibit our state government from contracting out jobs overseas which are paid for by Washington taxpayers.

We are encouraged to buy locally and we must do what we can to hire locally as well. That means providing a skilled homegrown workforce, a business-friendly climate, and the incentive to keep jobs here in Washington.

Real Answers for Patients and Doctors

To fix the economy, part of the solution must be controlling the skyrocketing costs of health care. A vital part of that is making sure that doctors can afford to offer their services throughout the state. A one-size-fits-all solution doesn't work here - it will take a concerted effort from all parties involved to control costs.



Over the past several months, I have met with doctors in the district, and my House colleagues, to solve the puzzle of lowering medical malpractice insurance premiums while protecting patient safety. Simply capping jury awards will not solve the problem of skyrocketing insurance premiums for our doctors. We need solutions that address all of the reasons why these rates are increasing. That is why I support a package of reforms that will give patients and doctors both short- and long-term solutions to the crisis in liability insurance.

The House proposal would achieve three things: Increase patient safety; assure that physicians and hospitals can get the insurance they need while stabilizing their insurance rates; and improve our civil justice system while protecting the constitutional rights of patients.

For more information on the details of the House Democrat's Med Mal Plan, visit: <http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/issues/health/medmalbrief.asp>

Improving Health Care Accessibility

The cost of health care in our country is at alarming levels, forcing many to choose between food or heat or the prescriptions and care they need. For others, it isn't even a matter of choice — health care is just not an option, and that is a terrible thing.

Part of our economic recovery will rely on the availability and affordability of health care. It does us no good to increase funding to education if kids are sick or hungry. We received federal money for children's health insurance and will use it to restore many of the cuts made last year.

32nd Legislative District



We will continue to work on controlling the cost of prescription drugs. Making prescription drugs more affordable is critical to improving the quality of care. After years of fighting, we scored a major victory for our families and seniors when we passed a prescription drug reform bill. But we need to build on that success and keep working to improve access to affordable health care for all our citizens.

Looking for discounts on prescription drugs? A new toll-free phone number may be able to help.

The Washington State Legislature created the Pharmacy Connections program to help senior citizens and others take advantage of prescription-drug discounts they may be eligible to receive.

The Senior Information and Pharmacy Connections Line is available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Mondays through Fridays.

Call 1-888-435-3377

Further information about the Pharmacy Connections program and Washington state's prescription-drug reforms can be found at:
www.rx.wa.gov

What Do You Think?

Each year, I ask for your opinion on the major issues before the Legislature. It's important for me to know where you stand. **Please fill out the survey below or online at my web site: <http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/kagi>**

What is the most important issue the Legislature should address this session? _____

Jobs

Are you worried about losing your job or your health coverage?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What should we do to create jobs?

Better training and retraining for workers

☐ Yes ☐ No

Provide tax incentives to create family-wage jobs

☐ Yes ☐ No

Prevent outsourcing of Washington state jobs

☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ Other _____

Health care

Do you have health coverage?

☐ Yes ☐ No

The State currently requires all health plans to include a variety of treatments, including naturopaths, acupuncturists, licensed midwives, chiropractors, licensed massage therapists, and certified dietitians and nutritionists. This increases the cost of premiums. Would you support reducing some of these mandates in order to reduce the cost of health care?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Which proposals would you support to address the rise in medical malpractice insurance premiums for doctors?

- ☐ Require more accountability from insurance companies
- ☐ Provide better safety education and communication for doctors
- ☐ Reduce the time and cost of legal battles
- ☐ Limit the amount of money a victim can receive from a jury to \$250,000
- ☐ Subsidize the cost of malpractice insurance to lower cost and increase availability

Do you feel that Washington State citizens should have the right to purchase needed prescription drugs from Canada?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Education

Do you have children or grandchildren in our public schools?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you worried about your children or grandchildren getting into college, or having the money to pay for tuition?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are these reforms a good idea?

Prevent teacher strikes with binding arbitration

☐ Yes ☐ No

Use taxpayer money to pay for charter schools

☐ Yes ☐ No

Allowing school districts to pass funding levies by a simple majority (51% approval) rather than the current supermajority needed (60% approval)

☐ Yes ☐ No

Taxes

Do you think our tax system is fair to the middle class and working families?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What reforms do you support?

Cut taxes and the services they pay for

☐ Yes ☐ No

Increase the sales tax and/or property tax to better fund Education?

☐ Yes ☐ No

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Eliminate tax exemptions that help create new jobs?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Reduce sales tax and/or property tax and implement an income tax

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Environment

There is evidence that the use of lead shot by hunters can potentially pollute land and water and make its way into the food chain. Would you support a ban on the use of lead in hunting?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

When the state issues an air pollutant alert, warning, or emergency, there is currently no way to enforce the potential ban on certain practices like wood-burn-

ing or emission reduction. Would you support stricter enforcement of these air quality issues?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

The State Primary

The federal courts have declared our "blanket primary" unconstitutional. The Legislature needs to enact a new primary system. What would you support?

- ☐ **Modified Blanket Primary, Top Two Go To General Election:** Voters do not declare their party affiliation when they register to vote, and are permitted to vote for one candidate for each partisan office. They are not restricted to voting for candidates from only one major party. The choice each voter makes is not made

public record. For each office, the two candidates who receive the most votes appear on the general election ballot, regardless of party affiliation. This approach is used by Louisiana.

- ☐ **Open Primary, Private Declaration of Party Affiliation:** At the polls, each voter selects a primary ballot for a party. The choice they make as to which party's ballot they select is not made public. The top vote getter for each party moves to the general election ballot. This model is used in Montana.
- ☐ **Do Nothing:** All candidates would appear on the general election ballot similar to the situation in the recent California recall election

Let's Talk

at the 32nd Legislative District
Town Hall Meeting

Saturday, Feb. 21st

10 am - **Third Place Books**

17171 Bothell Way N, Lake Forest Park

1 pm - **Shoreline Museum**

749 N. 175th St., Shoreline

*Please fill out the enclosed
survey and mail it back to
me or record your responses
online at my web site:*

<http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/kagi>